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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MOSCOW 001536

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [RS](#) [GG](#)  
SUBJECT: RUSSIA-GEORGIA: HARD RUSSIAN LINE ON SOUTH OSSETIA  
REF: TBILISI 282

Classified By: Acting DCM Kirk Augustine. Reason 1.4 (b, d)

1. (C) SUMMARY. Both the Russians (4th CIS Department Director Kelin) and Georgians (State Minister for Conflict Resolution Khaindrava) gave us separate readouts of their February 16 talks in Moscow. The talks focused on South Ossetia in the wake of the Georgian Parliamentary resolution calling for a replacement of the Russian Peacekeeping Force. Kelin called for an immediate JCC meeting, but not in Vienna. Khaindrava told us the Russians had demanded that the JCC meet in Moscow; he had refused. Kelin warned that armed confrontations are an imminent threat and said the atmosphere is not right for unilateral Russian gestures on demilitarization, including with regard to the enclave of 12 Georgian villages north of Tskhinvali. Khaindrava said Georgia has started undertaking all ten demilitarization measures recommended by the Quad ambassadors in Tbilisi, and warned that Russia is working to build a road that will deny the Georgian villages access to Georgian-controlled territory. We pressed the Russians hard to reciprocate Georgian gestures, but there appeared to be little appetite to do so; we also pressed Khaindrava to moderate Georgian rhetoric, and he restrained comments he made to the press in our presence. End summary.

The Next JCC

2. (C) A/DCM called on Kelin February 16 to note the restraint in the resolution Georgia's Parliament adopted February 15. He said we had been working hard with the Georgians. He noted that the tone of the Russian MFA statement had been relatively restrained. Kelin replied that the Georgian resolution could be interpreted in different ways. Moderates could point out that it set no deadline. Hardliners (such as Georgia's Minister of Defense) could point to its demand to the GOG to eliminate the Russian peacekeepers. Russia envisaged a meeting of the Joint Control Commission (JCC) as soon as possible, but not in Vienna as previously planned; it should rather take place "much closer to the scene." Asked whether that meant Moscow, he said he would not exclude Moscow or any other site. The matter was "under discussion" among the parties.

3. (C) In a subsequent conversation with poloff, Khaindrava said the Russians had demanded that the JCC take place in Moscow so that FM Lavrov could preside over it. Noting that both the Russians and South Ossetians had previously agreed to Vienna, Khaindrava said he had categorically rejected that proposed change. His analysis was that Russia wanted to show that it was in control of the process. During our conversation, Khaindrava received calls from Tbilisi (including from PM Noghaideli) and tried to get the GOG to enlist the support of the OSCE Mission to oppose the change of JCC venue.

14. (C) Kelin said that Khaindrava had concentrated on demilitarization, and in particular the outer (South Ossetian) trenches surrounding an enclave of 12 Georgian villages north of Tskhinvali. Kelin said the current atmosphere did not allow progress on this issue. To Russia, demilitarization meant in the first instance the withdrawal of Georgian MPs who were illegally in the zone of conflict, and the elimination of unofficial armed formations supporting the Georgian cause. A/DCM asked who would be responsible for civil order if the Georgian MPs were withdrawn; Kelin replied that the PKF was mandated to carry out that task. A/DCM asked whether Russia would respond to unilateral Georgian demilitarization with any steps of its own, noting that there had been talk of having international observers monitor the Roki Tunnel and a withdrawal of Russian personnel and equipment that did not belong in the zone of conflict. Would Russia help respond to Georgian moves to encourage a positive dynamic?

15. (C) Kelin said he did not believe the time was right to discuss such moves. The main effort had to be to avoid confrontations on the ground. Georgia was on the verge of increasing the staff of its peacekeepers (their 600-person battalion was now only half-staffed), and it had a brigade deployed nearby in Gori. Kelin said we should bear in mind that there was disagreement in Tbilisi between those who favor a "mild" approach and those who favored more radical action. He said Khaindrava had asked the Russians to take some steps so he could report back to the GOG that Russia had made some moves, and therefore the peacekeepers could stay. Kelin did not believe that any drawdown of Russian forces

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could be made in light of current tensions, including recent "provocative" incidents staged by Georgian forces.

16. (C) A/DCM pressed Kelin on whether there were not Russian forces and equipment present in the zone of conflict beyond what was allowed for the PKF. Could there be no withdrawals of such forces and equipment if the Georgians first took confidence-building steps? Kelin responded only that Russia had just received an appeal from the South Ossetian "Parliament" to remain. With regard to the Roki Tunnel, that was an economic issue that should be discussed along with other economic CBMs when there was a "normal climate." He noted that the issue was the placement of border and customs posts, and the late Georgian PM Zhvania had agreed to place those south of Tskhinvali. Kelin stated several times that the threat of armed confrontation on the ground was immediate and had first priority. As to a peace plan, he regretted that the support for a peace process in South Ossetia by the U.S. Secretary of State and Russian Foreign Minister at Ljubljana, and the endorsement of that support by the OSCE Ministerial, was interpreted by some to mean support for a particular peace proposal (i.e., Saakashvili's plan). The JCC would need to develop a workplan drawing from both Saakashvili's and Kokoity's plans.

17. (C) On those issues Khaindrava told us that Georgia has already started implementing all ten of the demilitarization CBMs proposed by the Quad Ambassadors in Tbilisi. One of those was filling out Georgia's quota of the PKF battalion. Khaindrava noted that with so many of Georgia's troops deployed to Iraq, Georgia would be able to raise its PKF staffing only to 400 (of the 600 allowed). With regard to the enclave villages, Khaindrava said Russia was hard at work building a road west of the villages, "with money provided by Luzhkov," that would, if controlled by Ossetians, allow the villagers to be denied access to the rest of Georgia. Nonetheless, Georgia would carry out all ten demilitarization recommendations. Asked whether Georgia had made an announcement to that effect, Khaindrava replied, "No. We will announce them after we have carried them out."

## Avoiding Confrontations, Provocations

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¶18. (C) A/DCM noted to Kelin the emphasis the Russian statement had put on preserving "existing mechanisms," and asked whether there were specific steps that Russia was looking for from Georgia now to improve the atmosphere. Kelin replied that the JCC would establish what needed to be done. A/DCM said we believed the efforts of Ambassador Tefft and other USG officials had had an effect in moderating the parliamentary resolution and restraining Georgian rhetoric. We had found our dialogues with Special Envoy Kenyaikin useful. Kelin said Russia appreciated the U.S. and European efforts, but was not convinced that the excesses had in fact been reined in. There had been serious provocations on the ground. "Our people will not stand idle if there is an outbreak of violence." He hoped that the U.S. would warn the Georgian side of the dangers of the situation. A/DCM reiterated that we were urging moderation to all parties, but we understood the Georgian sense of frustration with the lack of progress on ending the conflict. Russia needed to identify those forces within the Georgian government who favored a constructive resolution and provide them arguments they could use to oppose more militant approaches. The U.S. would continue to do everything possible to tone down the rhetoric and encourage a peaceful resolution.

¶19. (C) Poloff later reiterated the need for restraint to Khaindrava, and when he received a call from a Russian press agency he answered it, in our presence, in an extremely restrained way. He said he expected that there would be provocations -- specifically, that the Ossetians would start to demarcate their border with electric wire. Georgia could not stand idly by if there were attacks on Georgian citizens in the enclave within South Ossetia, but other than that he would work to see that Georgia was not lured into reacting to provocations. His final analysis, though, was that the Russians would do anything to protect the status quo.

### Further Talks?

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¶10. (C) Khaindrava said he was scheduled to meet DFM Karasin February 17, but doubted the meeting would take place after his refusal to accept a Moscow venue for the JCC. Likewise, he said the Russians had told him that PM Noghaideili's visit to Moscow, scheduled for February 27, would be doubtful if the JCC meeting did not take place in Moscow.

¶11. (C) When A/DCM asked Kelin about the current responsibilities of MFA envoys dealing with Georgia, Kelin

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confirmed that Special Envoy Kenyaikin had taken over Ambassador Savolskiy's portfolio of military negotiations (including some with Ukraine) and supervising special ambassadors. He also confirmed that Ambassador Lev Mironov, who suffered a stroke during the Ljubljana OSCE Ministerial, had returned to Moscow but remained in a medical institute. The process of nominating successors to realign all relevant responsibilities, he said, was not complete. Khaindrava said he had been introduced to Kenyaikin's successor, but "forgot his name." (He promised to get us the name on February 17.)

### Comment

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¶12. (C) We read the Russian move to change the venue of the JCC as being in the first instance a reaction to the "threat" that the composition of the JCC -- or the PKF -- might be changed to include more westerners. Kelin's warnings about the immediate danger of armed confrontations appeared intended to justify the need to maintain current Russian force levels. In its demand to host the next JCC meeting in Moscow, Russia is performing a bit of diplomatic ju jitsu to

use the force of Georgia's parliamentary resolution against Georgia itself, and ideally to come out of it with even greater Russian control over the process. We would recommend the the U.S. remind the Moscow that there was substantial debate about the venue for the JCC meeting, and Vienna was chosen as a result of delicate negotiations led by Russia itself. Russia and Georgia should concentrate on the issues at hand: demilitarization, renunciation of the use of force, economic rehabilitation, and a workplan over which both Georgians and Ossetians can take ownership.

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